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Honouring Culture and Language: Culturally Responsive Teaching in Social Work Education in English medium Instruction

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Abstract

Language comprehension, practice competence, and cultural identity are common issues within social work instructional environments that use English medium instruction. Eliminating the language of a culture from instruction can also eliminate sociocultural understandings and create disconnects for adapting social work practice to local communities. A culturally responsive teaching approach incorporates the student's cultural background in teaching. Two social work instructors used reflective journaling to describe their application of culturally responsive teaching within United Arab Emirates social work courses that used English medium instruction. Their descriptions indicated that culturally responsive teaching provided opportunities to identify gaps in student learning and adapt teaching and learning to the local context.

Keywords: *Culturally responsive teaching; English medium instruction; Social work; United Arab Emirates*

Introduction

For social work students to develop culturally sensitive and relevant practices, they need to be presented with an education in which they see themselves, their communities, and their languages reflected in their learning (Gray, 2005; Polleck & Shabdin, 2013). However, the global and rapid increase of English medium instruction (EMI), or "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37) can become an impediment to developing culturally sensitive practice or even acquiring a higher education degree (Sultana, 2014). Reasons include a complex mix of weaknesses in English proficiency and differences in cultural understandings of students and instructors (Wagner & Bogiages, 2020).

Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching (CRT) approach can potentially mitigate these issues. A key notion of CRT is that students may experience cultural discrepancies between their culture, learning, and learning environment during instruction (Gay, 2018). By situating learning within the student's lived experiences and cultural context, learning becomes relevant to the student (Gay, 2018). While historically, CRT has been more frequently applied in primary and secondary school environments, there is recent research on its efficacy with adult learners, and the importance of using CRT at all levels of education (Johnson & Owen, 2013; Rhodes, 2018).

Two educators who taught within a UAE, Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program that used EMI, implemented CRT to increase the cultural relevancy of their teaching. They provide a review of EMI, Gay's (2018) CRT approach, and describe their experiences and reflections using CRT to assist students in adapting social work education to local cultural contexts.

Literature review

EMI within higher education

Globally, EMI has grown at an accelerated rate in all levels of education, but more so in higher education (Macaro et al., 2018). Dearden (2014), for example, identified 55 countries where this instructional approach was established or was in the process of being established. Higher education institutions within these countries reported an average of 78.2% of public universities and 90% of private universities used EMI (Marco et al., 2018). Reasons for this growth include political, economic, and practical benefits such as the rise of globalisation and the need for a unifying language for communication (Koksal & Tercan, 2019). In higher education, English is viewed as the international research language and the chosen language of universities who seek international students and recognition (Macaro et al., 2018; Megahead, 2017). Nationally, some of the oil-rich countries that comprise the Arab Gulf states, such as the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Sultanate of Oman have prioritised English as part of their national agendas and visions and/or adopted higher education English-language-related policies (Al-Bakri, 2013; Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018; Selvi & Yazan, 2017).

Resource issues are also a factor and, globally, many higher education institutions have limited educational resources in their native or first languages (Macaro et al., 2018). Even in professions such as social work that emphasise the indigenisation of practice, countries, including countries in the Arabian Gulf, may have limited local social work research and/or social work teaching materials in the first language (Macaro et al., 2018; Megahead, 2017; Sloan et al., 2017). Indeed, Megahead (2017) asserts that there is a "paucity of published research on social work practice throughout the Arab world" (p. 362). Additionally, some Arabian Gulf universities have extensively adopted Western degree program curricula, seek Western accreditation of programs, and many continue to recruit expatriate, Western-trained faculty (Albrithen, 2012; Alkaabi, 2016; Ibrahim, 2017; Sloan et al., 2017). These factors can increase program reliance on partial or full use of EMI.

Issues abound with eliminating the language of a culture from higher education. Practical issues include the rapid implementation of English in teaching, without adequate planning or resources (Macaro et al., 2018). Instructors often have limited (if any) guidelines available for the implementation of EMI (Dearden, 2014). This can lead to problems of weak comprehension and engagement in college courses due to a lack of English proficiency and become a major reason for students not succeeding in higher education (Ahmadi, 2017; Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; Macaro et al., 2018; Sultana, 2014).

There are also ethical and political implications. Globally, imperialism led to the underdevelopment of first languages, widespread use of English and, as Roth (2018) asserts, created an historical and present-day dynamic of linguistic hegemony in which English is a source of symbolic power and capital. The rise of the English language and its etiology in the Arabian Gulf can also be traced to the power dynamics of Western imperialism and the region's colonised past, in which there is a lingering preference for English (Siemund et al., 2020; Sloan et al., 2017). The globalisation of education, fueled by e-learning technologies and private Western university expansion, has further solidified English language dominance (Selvi & Yazan, 2017; Troudi & Hafidh, 2017).

Social work education, EMI and the Arabian Gulf

The "MENA" region comprises 22 countries located in the Middle East and Northern Africa (Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2013). Social work education has existed in the region since the 1930s when Western-educated social workers introduced a western model of social work in Egypt and established the Cairo School of Social Work (Albrithen, 2012). By the 1960s, social work began to spread to other Arab countries (Albrithen, 2012; Graham & Al Krenawi, 2013). Yet Ragab (2016) argued that, in developing countries, this Western form of social work did not really address the most urgent needs due to its lack of indigenisation and congruence with local communities. More recently, regional social work education has attempted to balance Islamic culture with international social work and indigenise social work to local communities with some degree of success (Graham & Al Krenawi, 2013). Examples include increased regional research in scientific journals and local research in the areas of indigenous healing, cultural mediation, and emergent localised family casework (Albrithen, 2014; Graham & Al Krenawi, 2013).

Yet other factors may have slowed the indigenisation of social work such as a lack of, or limited, local and regional professional social work organisations, regional social work literature, limited, or albeit growing, research and social work research in Arabic (Alkaabi, 2016; Ibrahim, 2016; Megahead, 2017). Although, regionally, there is a diversity of instructional language approaches with some countries such as Qatar using Arabic as the language of instruction, while others, such as the UAE and Kuwait, adopting EMI at the tertiary level, the dominance of English can still negatively impact social work education indigenisation (Hillman & Eibenschutz, 2018; Macaro et al., 2018. Alkaabi (2016), for example, noted that the lack of academic references in Arabic at Qatar University, was viewed as a program impediment by a social work program student focus group, while Ibrahim (2017) noted the isolative impact of limited English skills among students and social work programs from eight MENA countries.

This reflects a broader linguistic issue in social work education. Even when an educational institution does not mandate EMI, Harrison (2009) pointed out the central role of English in social work knowledge development. English is essentially treated as neutral, with little attention to the role of language in identity formation (Harrison, 2009). Language politics are viewed as less important in social work and occupy a "peripheral space" (Harrison, 2009, p. 1083). Yet, eliminating the language of a culture from social work education exacerbates comprehension and engagement issues and creates problems in how or if social work is adapted to or fits local cultural contexts (Gray, 2005; Harrison, 2007).

Theoretical framework: Culturally responsive teaching

Gay's (2018) model of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) provides a framework that uses the student's culture and experiences to strengthen the connection between the learning objectives and what students actually learn. Learning becomes personally meaningful and relevant to students because their culture is placed at the centre of the learning process through the use of collaborative teaching practices in which respectful relationships and sensitivity to cultures, and cultural values are emphasised (Gay, 2018; Green et al., 2016; Habli, 2015; Wagner & Bogiages, 2020).

Four key components comprise Gay's model of CRT: *caring*, *communication*, *curriculum*, and *congruity*. Empathy and a willingness to engage with students where they are at are components of culturally responsive caring (Gay, 2018). This includes consistently seeking methods to understand students, and honouring their experiences, backgrounds, and diversity (Gay, 2018; Johnson & Owen, 2013). Caring blends with communication and a willingness to accommodate both verbal and non-verbal discourse styles. The educator tailors communication to specific contexts to develop connections such as some use of the students' first language (Gay, 2018; Habli, 2015; Wagner & Bogiages, 2020). Even when the instructor is not fluent in the first language, Johnson and Owen (2013) emphasise the importance of creating avenues in teaching where use of the first language is encouraged, shared and valued.

Curriculum encompasses *what* students learn, and the use of the student's culture as a consistent pedagogical resource so that the curriculum is tailored in ways that are meaningful to the student (Habli, 2015; Wagner & Bogiages, 2020). In Islamic countries, for example, developing an understanding of cultural norms and values and assisting students in identifying areas of congruence between their context and social work practice can create meaningful learning connections (Ibrahim, 2016; Singh et al., 2011). Finally, cultural congruity ensures the methods of instruction or *how* students learn are culturally congruent with the learners' culture and are understood by the learner. An example could be providing more structure and direction when using student-centred pedagogy with learners who are unfamiliar with the approach (Baeten et al., 2016).

Methods

Setting: EMI and a UAE BSW program

English, in the UAE, has become an integral part of the educational system, and all UAE federal higher education institutions use an EMI approach (Siemund et al., 2020). Indeed, the complexity of the UAE social environment with a large expatriate workforce encourages the need for a unifying language, and English has become the "de facto lingua franca" (Siemund et al., 2020, p. 2). UAE social work educational programs are no exception. Yet EMI policies present particular challenges for social work students who will mostly practise in Arabic and attempt to adapt social work practice and responses to local contexts (Gray, 2005).

These challenges were apparent at a BSW program within a UAE public higher education institution. UAE students coming into the federal education system must take an English qualifying exam or accepted equivalency, and all students enrolled in the social work program had the required exam scores. Nevertheless, problems with oral and/or written communication were common. Only Emirati national students attend public higher educational institutions; therefore, all students in the BSW program were Emirati women between the ages of 18 and 23. BSW faculty, similar to teaching faculty throughout the college system, were mostly expatriate and/or had been educated or trained in Western teaching approaches.

Research design and rational

Although CRT was frequently used by the authors, they attempted to capture and intentionally reflect upon their experiences implementing CRT in an EMI environment, during three different semesters over the course of a three-year period. Reflective journaling provided the instructors a means to systematise their reflections of CRT as a teaching approach that could meet the sociocultural needs of their students. Reflective journaling also provided opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of their own teaching practices, and more specifically, how their use of CRT could influence an EMI, social work teaching environment (Capitelli, 2015). Thus, the following question guided their investigations:

- How do BSW faculty describe their experiences using CRT in an EMI teaching environment?

Participants

Culture influences teaching (Gay, 2018). Thus, the identities of the instructors shaped how they used CRT. In other words, their experiences were shaped by their positions or shifting identities within the context of practice and teaching. Concepts of etic and emic can provide a way to conceptualise positions within the shifting cultural context (Chereni, 2014). Emic refers to a first-hand, often insider, role. This position includes shared cultural markers with the context such as shared language, religion, beliefs, and traditions. Etic, on the other hand, is associated with an outsider status, one which shares few cultural markers with the context (Chereni, 2014). Instructor A, for example, shared characteristics of both a cultural insider and outsider. Identifying as a cisgender woman, Instructor A is from Africa and identifies as African. She was educated in both Africa and the West. She shares cultural characteristics with the region in language, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions. Instructor B was a cultural outsider; from North America and educated in the West. Instructor B is Caucasian and identifies as a cisgender woman. She was not fluent in Arabic, the dominant language of the region, and did not share the same regional religious or cultural traditions.

Procedures

The instructors implemented journaling in different social work courses based upon their course loads. Researcher B implemented her journal over a period of two consecutive semesters within a family social work course of 14 students and 16 students respectively. Researcher A implemented her reflective journaling over the course of one semester in a Social justice and Diversity course of 22 students and a Social Policy, and Social Development course of 15 students. All students enrolled in these courses had been accepted into the social work program. Instructors both received the necessary institutional and/or departmental approvals prior to initiating their journaling.

Instructors met on a monthly basis, either face to face or virtually, to process their reflections. Instructor B initiated her journal first and processed it with Instructor A from her point of view as a monolingual English speaker. Instructor A was interested in developing her own journal based on her experiences as a bilingual speaker and initiated her journal after Instructor B. The instructors utilised a systematic approach to journaling in which journaling was completed after the classes were taught each week (Lamb, 2013). Journaling was guided by the following questions:

1. What CRT strands did I use and why? What was the outcome?
2. What teaching linguistic or cultural barriers if any do I observe?
3. What cultural strengths or opportunities do I observe?

Findings

Strand 1: Culturally responsive caring

Educators who include culturally responsive caring in their teaching practices carefully listen and observe students, while maintaining a high degree of self-awareness (Gay, 2018). Instructor A, for example, used class discussions as opportunities to identify students who were not participating. Instructor A noted that, when she initiated discussions in the first language, "quieter students and even students who were academically at risk take part in the discussions." This provided avenues for caring connections with these students.

Culturally responsive caring also includes pedagogical behaviours that demonstrate a commitment to student learning (Gay, 2018). Instructor B implemented this strand by developing two orientation sessions at the beginning of the semester to help students understand the technological and student-centred aspects of family social work courses. Student-centred learning requires students to assume more responsibility in the learning process and was not always congruent with past learning experiences for students coming from more teacher-centric environments (Baeten et al., 2016; Wagner & Bogiages, 2020). Thus, the orientation sessions provided opportunities to observe and address differing cultural perceptions of teaching and learning. Instructor B noted in her journal that, by the second week, students were consistently engaged in the small group work, class discussions, and provided positive feedback on the teaching approach used in the course.

Strand 2: Communication

Both instructors recognised that, within an EMI environment, meeting students' cultural needs in the area of communication and language was essential to preventing disconnects. Thus, both instructors intentionally used some first language during instruction. As a bilingual speaker, Instructor A was able to clarify and assist students with learning connections by questioning in Arabic. In her reflective journal, Instructor A described an English discussion in her Social Development and Social Policy course in which students could not contextualise policy making. This changed when she initiated the same discussion in Arabic.

> When I spoke about this in Arabic and asked where they could go to try to resolve this problem or initiate a policy, then they were able to refer to how people reach out to their leaders. . . so the students knew this very well. . . but they were not able to explain it because the textbook language and context was a barrier.

This example is supported by Gay's (2018) assertion that student learning requires more than translation: it also requires connections to culture. Other strategies used by Instructor A included her modified method of English-Arabic-English, in which Instructor A explained concepts in both English and Arabic and asked students to repeat the concepts back to her in their own words and in Arabic (Saidi & Ansaldo, 2017). She did this to ensure students understood the concepts in their first language. As stated in her research journal about teaching the concept of marginalisation in her Social Justice and Diversity course, "When I teach in English and give examples only in English and then engage the students, very few

students were able to show understanding of the concepts as compared to when I use English-Arabic-English." Using both Arabic and English assisted Instructor A in identifying gaps in understandings and assisted her students in developing relevant contextual connections.

A monolingual English speaker, Instructor B sought the assistance of bilingual faculty and embedded key Arabic words and phrases in the digital materials placed within the online Family Social Work course materials. Students could view and comprehend first language words and phrases within the English linguistic context. This provided needed scaffolding to assist them in developing an understanding of complex course concepts. As one student explained, she used to spend a lot of time trying to understand equivalent terms in Arabic, but having the embedded terminologies helped her to understand and understand quickly. Instructor B also converted her lectures to online videos that included some first language within the digital slides.

Strand 3: Curriculum

Curriculum, or what students learn, should align with the cultural context to help students comprehend and conceptualise the adaption of social work practices to local communities (Singh et al., 2011).

Both instructors highlighted the importance of using culturally responsive curriculum materials. Some were written by the instructors due to what Sloan et al. (2017) refers to as "the continuous struggle to identify local teaching materials, theories and practice models that are indigenous to the Arabian Gulf" (p. 205). Both instructors noted the importance of teaching culturally relevant theories and information. In Instructor B's Family Social Work course, for example, dependency on the family and complying with family rules and values could be viewed from an Arabic cultural point of view as developmentally appropriate while, from a Western point of view, this may be negatively labeled (Dwairy, 2006; Nouman et al., 2018). Thus, theories, such as person in environment and multicultural family life cycle perspective were emphasised, while individualistic cultural values such as independence, autonomy, and differentiation of self were de-emphasised (Al Krenawi & Graham, 2003; Erdem & Safi, 2018).

Instructor A described how she could not locate regional teaching materials for her Social Policy and Social Development course. Available textbooks were Western policy textbooks that did not: 1) cover or contextualise concepts specific to the UAE policy practice; and/or 2) could not adequately be explained in English such as governing practices that did not have relevant English corresponding terms. Examples of these missing concepts included the use of *majilis* (governor's court) and the concept of *Shura* where the Sheikh (leader) consults with other community leaders. Instructor A addressed this comprehension gap by using her bilingual skills to assist students in identifying relevant policy-making practices, and corresponding examples within their cultural context such as the use of presidential decree as opposed to legislative policy making.

Finally, critical reflection was a component of most courses. Whitaker and Reimer (2017) describe critical reflection as a complex process to increase student self-awareness, interactions, ethical behaviours and theory. Both instructors noted issues with reflective analysis and application due in part to linguistic impediments, particularly in written assessments, and overall problems connecting their cultural knowledge with social work practice. Instructor A attributed these problems to contextualizing knowledge: "students live it but they cannot understand the constructs in English. They have to conceptualize within their cultural or environmental context. Language can be a source of disconnect." Both instructors addressed these issues through the use of culturally congruent teaching practices highlighted in the next section.

Strand 4: Congruity

Students learn best and retain more, when new knowledge is connected to prior experiences or familiar frameworks (Gay, 2018). This becomes even more important in an EMI environment where the language and the discipline-specific knowledge are unfamiliar, increasing the importance of *how* instructors teach and the methods they use. Thus, both instructors attempted to be culturally responsive by infusing cultural norms and knowledge, familiar teaching strategies, and/or first language during teaching to assist students in making connections. Instructors frequently asked students about links between social work practice and cultural norms and values and brought these into the discussion. Instructor A, for example, highlighted links between social work values of respect for clients and Islamic values of respect for vulnerable populations in her Social Justice and Diversity course. Instructor B emphasised discussion topics and case samples that recognised the central role of family and family involvement in problem solving as culturally normative examples for her Family Social Work course.

While historically not a familiar teaching approach in Middle Eastern countries, active learning was used in ways that were culturally recognisable to the students (Filatova, 2015). For example, small group work, used by both instructors, provided students with a connection to their collective, cultural context by encouraging mutual aid, and also offered opportunities for the use of the first language in the creation of group projects (Filatova, 2015). Additionally, both instructors used a facilitative approach during group work that included utilising the students as resources for understanding local, cultural norms, and asking them to share their experiences. Instructor A encouraged students to tell her about community-based policy practice, and students shared their family involvement in the local *majilis*. This discussion provided culturally relevant examples for how social issues could be set as agenda items in the policy-making process. Instructor B consistently asked students for examples of how Emirati families would traditionally address family problems and strategies for adapting social work family skills within their local context. Attention to culturally congruent teaching strategies assisted instructors to understand and address potential incongruencies between academic learning and cultural norms as well as reinforcing the "context bound nature of social work" (Ashencaen-Crabtree, 2008; Gray, 2005, p. 232). In turn, they used this knowledge as cultural scaffolding to assist their students in making connections between their experiences and new social work knowledge, then challenging students to apply new knowledge and skills to their communities.

A cultural scaffolding method used by both instructors was encouraging students to write their own case samples and role plays to assist students in applying social work knowledge, and broaden discussions about similarities and differences of help-seeking behaviours and responses. As described in Instructor B's journal after students wrote and presented their role plays: "The discussions have taken on a deeper, more critical look at the material . . .Role plays were highly engaging and the student brought complicated cases forward."

Finally, cultural congruity comprises attention to how new learning is structured for comprehension (Gay, 2018). Thus, Instructor A used relevant Arabic language videos highlighting regional social problems as well as encouraging students to use Arabic language and regional videos in their presentations, so students could conceptualise local, community-based problems. Instructor A noted the positive influence on class engagement: "the level of engagement is very high and all the students have something valuable to contribute to the discussion." Conversely, Instructor B chunked or shortened lecture videos to no more than 15 minutes, highlighting only the salient points. The shortened videos provided a means for students to focus their attention on the relevant concepts and comprehend at their own pace, and as one student stated: "I can review and go back if I do not understand." (Wagner & Bogiages, 2020).

Discussion and recommendations for social work education

Despite resource gaps in countries that preclude complete first-language instruction, more can be done to embed first languages in EMI social work curricula. An inattention to the languages of local cultures can create practice communication barriers, and broader issues of adapting social work practice to the cultural context. CRT, however, can provide strategies to mitigate communication barriers and strengthen cultural relevancy within EMI environments.

Mitigating communication barriers and explaining social work terms and interventions in a client's first language can be challenging even when the social worker is proficient in the first language. Professional concepts and terms do not always have a direct, word-for-word translation (Olcon et al., 2018; Wagner & Bogiages, 2020). The authors addressed this issue by infusing some Arabic language, i.e., concepts and vocabulary, during teaching and/or in the written materials. Although they noted positive student responses to these strategies, additional pedagogical approaches could be implemented to build first-language competencies. Sevilla et al. (2018) illustrated an alternative approach. They developed a graduate-level, Spanish social work course to improve clinical and professional linguistic competencies for students working with the increasing Southern California, Latinx population in the United States (US). Yet Olcon et al. (2018) go further and described their bilingual, BSW curriculum, and classroom discussions highlighting the lack of literal translation for social work concepts and how these terms could be used in the first language. Within the MENA region there has been an uptick in both social work research and social work research in the Arabic language, such as Saudi Arabian and Egyptian social work publications which also positively augments learning and indigenisation of practice (Almaizar & Abdelhamed, 2018; Megahead, 2019).

More pervasive problems are created when social work education is not sufficiently adapted to local communities, populations, and systems (Ashencaen-Crabtree, 2008). EMI, coupled with a lack of attention to cultural norms and values, can increase the risk of students misaligning practice interventions with the context, and overlooking opportunities for authentic indigenous interventions (Ragab, 2016). The authors of this study used culturally congruent teaching strategies such as infusing cultural norms, and culturally familiar teaching approaches to assist students in contextualising knowledge as well as using curriculum theories, models, and knowledge relevant to the Arabian Gulf. Yet broader curricular examples of culturally responsive indigenisation of social work education exist within the MENA region.

Since the inception of social work education in 1958, Iranian social work education programs have intentionally contextualised social work curricula by emphasising social problems, social work practice from an Islamic perspective, and cultural mores specific to Iran (Saleh, 2008). Recently in Afghanistan, the development of social work education child protection curricula and national standards development began with the use of participatory action research and included current social workers, clients, and "participation of Afghan voices on all levels" (Bragin et al., 2016, p. 59). An outcome of this process was allocating Islamic knowledge as an essential educational component for future Afghan social workers to assist them in defending human rights within an Islamic framework (Bragin et al., 2016. Ibrahim (2016) also highlights recent regional social work interest in merging Islamic values and culture with international social work. Adopting CRT can assist with such a merger by using the cultural context as a meaning-making resource and encouraging students to share their lived experiences. Students can analyse their experiences with relevant social work theories, and challenge theories that do not sufficiently address their culture (Olcon et al., 2018). Yet this sharing and analysis requires a safe space.

Tsuruda and Sheperd (2016) describe how they used CRT to implement an indigenous framework of *Porotaka Korero* (talking circles) to encourage a mutual learning environment when teaching a second-year social work course at the University of Auckland. They discovered that reciprocal sharing of experiences and perspectives created a safe classroom space in which co-learning took place and cultural inclusiveness was developed. The authors of this manuscript also found that implementing CRT created safe spaces for student and instructors to share cultural knowledge and experiences. Yet, it also provided space for student's first language in teaching and learning, which deepened understanding and enriched discussions, reflections, and learning for both students and instructors. The following recommendations provide suggestions for implementing CRT within social work educational environments that use EMI.

Co-teaching

For instructors teaching internationally, co-teaching and learning from instructors who are from the country or region can assist with gaining relevant cultural knowledge. An instructor who is a monolingual English instructor could be paired with a colleague from the culture or one who shares some insider role attributes such as first-language fluency. This strengthens bilingual delivery and potentially increases the pedagogical use of cultural examples, norms,

and values relevant to the context. An additional consideration is for instructors to gain knowledge and/or development of the first language through attending language classes (Carrilio & Mathiesen, 2006).

First language in instruction

A salient recommendation is for first languages to be brought into teaching. While a bilingual instructor or co-teacher is preferable, when this is not possible, the use of first-language terms and concepts can be embedded in the teaching materials and glossaries. In electronic environments, these terms can be hyperlinked to the translated first language terms to improve comprehension and develop culturally relevant social work practice through explicitly teaching first-language vocabulary that could be used in practice (Wagner & Bogiages, 2020).

Gay (2018) describes difficulties students experience in fully expressing their academic knowledge when their language and discourse patterns are ignored in instruction. Encouraging students to practise and present activities and projects in their first language or a bilingual format provides them with relevant experiences in adapting their practice to the linguistic context. This could include role plays and class presentations. In field education, the practice language, typically the first language, becomes prominent. Students should be encouraged to use their first language in field education seminar projects and assignments to strengthen their first language/bilingual competencies (Sevilla et al., 2018). Thus, field education seminars would ideally be taught by a faculty who is fluent in the language of the students, or a co-teaching model that includes language assistance for monolingual faculty.

Human simulation

Human simulation can be used to increase first language professional linguistic competence through the use of actors who engage in the role of the client. These actors could be faculty or field supervisors who are proficient in the first language. This provides students with a more authentic experience, the opportunity to use their first-language skills, and garner feedback from the actors and/or the course instructor (Colvin et al., 2020). Unlike, peer-to-peer role plays, human simulations are typically focused on real-world problems and interactions that are more closely aligned with what students will experience in practice (Colvin et al., 2020). Human simulation is also an example of a culturally congruous teaching strategy as practice education is embedded within a culturally relevant simulation.

Culturally relevant case samples

A curricular and congruous strategy, culturally relevant examples, and case samples can be infused throughout the curriculum. As opposed to using textbook examples, these should be written by instructors with assistance from members in the community, such as through consultations with local field supervisors. Some first language can be integrated into the case samples to strengthen linguistic relevancy. Encouraging students who have already completed fieldwork to write their own case samples and role play also provides a detailed description of the context and encourages a reflection on student strategies for adapting practice to the local context. Bennett et al. (2018) provide a unique example in which their program filmed

two case studies of social workers interacting with Aboriginal persons and their families. The films provided a rich contextual sample and, potentially, could be produced in the first language to assist with student conceptualisation of complex issues and practice interventions.

Community engagement projects

Community engagement and advocacy projects provide students with opportunities to use their first-language and social work competencies within the community context. These projects also provide students opportunities to develop macro-level skills (Letchfield et al., 2018). An example provided by Instructor A is outreach to community-based organisations regarding promotional needs. Students create promotional materials in the first language and receive feedback from organisational administrators. This furthers students' ability to adapt practice to the local context (Letchfield et al., 2018). Like human simulation, community action projects are examples of ways to utilise Gay's (2018) cultural congruity through embedding teaching within the local context.

Cultural humility

CRT begins with the importance of culturally responsive caring and learning about the cultural diversity students bring into our classes (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive caring is comparable to adopting an attitude of cultural humility. Cultural humility, in social work practice, has at its core, the willingness to engage in ongoing self-reflection, and accountability when engaging with diversity (Fisher-Bourne et al., 2015). More specifically, a commitment to how we engage in relationships through careful listening and learning from others of different backgrounds, while critically reflecting on our own behaviours and values (Bennett & Gates, 2019; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Tsuruda & Shepard, 2016). Extending this approach into teaching includes stepping out of the educator expert role, and embracing opportunities to learn from others (Gray, 2005; Tsuruda & Shepherd, 2016). This is demonstrated by listening *to* students about how they learn best, what practices can and cannot be adapted to their cultural context, and linguistic considerations; and finally, a desire to learn *from* students through observation, openness, and reflection to foster mutual learning and understanding.

Conclusion, limitations, and future research

EMI has expanded globally and become the preferred teaching and learning method at many higher education institutions. A mix of historical, economic, and practical reasons have fuelled this expansion. Social work education has, if not followed this trend, remained largely complacent.

CRT can be used to increase the cultural and linguistic relevancy within EMI teaching environments. The reflections of the authors revealed that blending culturally responsive curriculums and teaching methods with a linguistically responsive approach provided teaching insight into areas where students experienced gaps in understanding and application. This opened spaces to address these gaps and initiate dialogues over how social work practice could effectively be adapted to local cultures.

While the authors found that CRT enhanced their teaching, reflections presented in this manuscript are limited to their experiences and points of view. Important considerations for the future are research studies within UAE social work programs to evaluate CRT and its impact on student learning outcomes. Suggestions could include qualitative research that builds in the voice of the students and their experiences learning within CRT-mediated EMI environments. Other considerations could be quantitative or mixed method research such as surveys, or surveys and interviews and focus groups, to gauge student and instructor perceptions of CRT as a pedagogy to influence engagement and comprehension within social work EMI environments.

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